CHILDREN IN SOMALIA TO RECEIVE NEW VACCINATION AGAINTS DEADLY DISEASES

Joint Press Release GAVI Alliance / UNICEF / WHO

**Mogadishu/Garowe/Hargeisa (24 April 2013**) – The Somali authorities launched a new five-in-one-vaccine against several potentially fatal childhood diseases on Wednesday, which could save thousands of lives.

From today, Somali children will receive the pentavalent vaccine, a combination of five vaccines in one against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), hepatitis B and *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib) - the bacteria that cause meningitis, pneumonia and other illnesses, all of which are highly prevalent. The vaccine will be part of Somalia’s routine immunisation programme.

More than 1.3 million doses of pentavalent vaccine have been provided to Somalia for 2013 and will be used to immunise children under one year of age. Pentavalent vaccines will be delivered to the 425,000 child born each year in Somalia through existing health structures as well as community health workers at district level. Each child will require three doses of the vaccine.

The launch of the new vaccine takes place in Mogadishu, Garowe (Puntland) and Hargeisa (Somaliland) and will be attended by government leaders and representatives from the GAVI Alliance, UNICEF and WHO.

“Somalia has one of the lowest immunisation rates in the world,” said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI Alliance. “The country’s health system has been destroyed after more than 20 years of conflict and thousands of children are not protected against killer diseases. This situation is unacceptable – every child deserves to be protected - and that’s why GAVI and its donors have committed substantial funding to Somalia until 2016.”

The launch of the vaccine is being accompanied by an outreach campaign to make parents aware of the importance of the new vaccine which replaces the DTP vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough). A recent household survey carried out by UNICEF and the relevant Ministries, found only 7% of children in Puntland and 11% of children in Somaliland had received the required three doses of DTP by their first birthday.

“It is crucial that this vaccine reaches every Somali child in the country,” said Sikander Khan, UNICEF Somalia Representative. “We urge all parents, community, traditional and religious leaders to participate in the immunisation activity, to ensure all children of Somalia can benefit from the protection offered.”

Continued conflict in Somalia has resulted in the country having child and maternal mortality rates among the highest in the world; one in every five Somali children dies before their fifth birthday.

The introduction of pentavalent vaccine means that for the first time Somali children will be protected against one of the causes of pneumonia, which is one of the leading causes of child deaths. It is the first time in 35 years that children in Somalia are being offered a vaccination that protects them against additional diseases apart from diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, measles, polio and tuberculosis which they already receive.

“Both Hib and hepatitis B are of public health importance,” said Dr Marthe Everard, World Health Organization Representative in Somalia. “There is little data on the epidemiologic burden of hepatitis B and Hib disease, or on the burden of diseases from meningitis or pneumonia, but data from neighbouring countries and the developing world indicate that Hib is a leading cause of acute bacterial meningitis and an important cause of severe pneumonia.”

Somalia is the 71st GAVI-eligible country to introduce the pentavalent vaccine – others include Afghanistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, East Timor, Pakistan and Yemen. By the end of 2014, all 73 GAVI-eligible countries will have introduced it.

The launch of the five-in-one pentavalent vaccine in Somalia takes place on the eve of the Global Vaccine Summit in Abu Dhabi, co-hosted by His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi; Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General. In partnership with GAVI, the Summit will celebrate progress in immunising children against polio and other life-threatening diseases.

The launch coincides with World Immunization Week as well as the African Vaccination Week. During this week, UNICEF and WHO will conduct a nationwide polio immunisation campaign in Somalia to protect children from life-long paralysis caused by the disease.

**Note**

Hib is a deadly bacterium, which is the third biggest cause of vaccine-preventable death in children aged under five worldwide. Hib causes a variety of diseases including meningitis and pneumonia with survivors suffering paralysis, deafness and learning disabilities. Hib disease can be transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.

Hepatitis B (hepB) is a viral infection that is more than 50 times more infectious than HIV and which claims 600,000 lives every year through chronic or acute liver infections. Babies and young children are most at risk from hepB, with the virus often passing from mother to child before or shortly after birth, and putting victims at high risk of death from cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer in later life.

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GAVI Alliance

The GAVI Alliance is a public-private partnership committed to saving children’s lives and protecting people’s health by increasing access to immunisation in developing countries. The Alliance brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry, technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private sector partners. GAVI uses innovative finance mechanisms, including co-financing by recipient countries, to secure sustainable funding and adequate supply of quality vaccines. Since 2000, GAVI has financed the immunisation of an additional 370 million children and prevented more than 5.5 million premature deaths. Learn more at [www.gavialliance.org](http://www.gavialliance.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

GAVI is funded by governments [Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States], the European Commission, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as private and corporate partners [Absolute Return for Kids, Anglo American plc., The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, Comic Relief, Dutch Postcode Lottery, His Highness Sheikh Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, JP Morgan, “la Caixa” Foundation, LDS Charities and Vodafone].

For more information, visit [www.gavialliance.org](http://www.gavialliance.org)

UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence.  The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS.  UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org/)

**WHO**

WHO helps countries integrate immunization into national health policies and plans and thus increase access to existing vaccines. The Organization promotes new vaccines and new initiatives such as the integrated plan to end preventable child deaths worldwide from pneumonia and diarrhoea by 2025. It works to ensure access to quality vaccines and immunization equipment, notably through the prequalification of vaccines and immunization equipment. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

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